

COUNTY COMMISSION: DISTRICT 19

Newcomer Lopez's aim to unseat GOP

By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

When Kurt Lopez looks at the Oakland County Commission, three letters come to mind: GOP.

What he doesn't see is a lot of diversity. The Farmington Hills resident is running as a Democratic challenger for the 19th District Oakland County Commission seat.

While he wants to change the look of the 25-member board, observers wouldn't paint a rosy outlook for his first-ever campaign.

Lopez, 24, faces an incumbent, Donn Wolf, in what is perceived as a rock-ribbed Republican area. Election day is Tuesday, Nov. 8.

The legal clerk and aspiring law student remains undaunted.

"Politically, I'm kind of a newcomer," said Lopez, who is a 1988 graduate of Harrison High, "which might be refreshing to some people."

His political resume reflects that of a campaign neophyte.

Lopez has a bachelor's degree in international politics from the University of Michigan-Dearborn. He plans to attend law school next year.

Lopez has worked on a few campaigns, including Congressman Dennis Hertel's and was a constituent case worker in his office. He's also on the Latino Family Services board and a member of the Foreign Language Awareness Group.

Commission omission prompted him to run, Lopez said.

"This is a one-party commission," added Lopez, who calls himself a "conservative" Democrat.

Lopez cites the county mental health board as an example. Not one member of the 12-member board was appointed by the Democratic Caucus, he said.

Lopez contends there is little representation by minorities and women on other boards whose members are appointed by the commission.

Lopez was born in Mexico City. His family moved to Southfield when he was 9. He's lived in Farmington Hills for eight years.

He's a minority, he said, one of two Mexican-American candidates running for commission this year. The other is Democrat Tina Vargas, running in the 4th District against Larry Crake.

"I'd get more people involved," Lopez said. "I'd make it known to the county executive to start appointing people in these head po-



Kurt Lopez

sitions who are either women or minorities.

"Or," he added, "I'd make him accountable to MALDEF" (Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, to which Lopez belongs).

Lopez has other priorities if elected.

One is curbing urban sprawl. He favors revitalizing existing areas as opposed to new development.

He's also a proponent of working closely with Wayne County. The reasons are obvious, he said.

"The roots in the success of Oakland County lie in the successes of Detroit," Lopez said.

"If all of a sudden we turn our backs and forget where our roots came from... If you let Detroit die, you'll let the people of Detroit come into Oakland County... It's kind of like not helping out your neighbor."

Lopez is going door to door to get his message out. He's refusing any campaign contributions, he said.

As for his opponent, Lopez said Wolf has been consistent with the Republican agenda. Lopez has not spoken with Wolf.

"When I first thought about running in this campaign I asked people who I was running against," Lopez said. "They said, 'Donn Wolf. He was known as the invincible man.'"

"I asked why. They said it's because he's been in office for a long time but few of the people he represents know who he is."



STAFF PHOTOS BY AJAY HEALY

What to buy?: Naama Zilber, 6, decides what to buy with her last dollar in a time-and-money class at Eagle Elementary School.



Getting it together: Six-year-old Victoria Ajayi works a geometry puzzle as her father, Richard, watches.

Math

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Parents were quick to pick up on the change at the Oct. 19 session.

Richard Ajayi of Farmington Hills knows a thing or two about numbers. He's a finance professor at Wayne State University.

"I think relating problems to real-life situations is the key," said Ajayi, who was watching his daughter, Victoria, 6, work on geometry problems.

"I have MBAs who don't like problem solving. Anytime you present them with it, they are 'Are you going to ask all that?' People are very scared of it."

In one mini-class on problem solving, parents and kids learned to create their own puzzles. Such tasks help children develop critical thinking skills, said teacher Pat Hanje.

"One of the keys of problem solving is persistence," Hanje said to her classroom. "Mathematics involves persistence."



Proposed addition: An artist's rendering shows the shape of things to come at Hillel Day School in Farmington Hills.

Adding on

Hillel Day School to expand

By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Hillel Day School in Farmington Hills has announced a major expansion for its Middlebelt Road facility.

Plans include a 28,000-square-foot addition and renovation of its existing facility. Six acres of land have been bought and will include new athletic fields.

Ground breaking is set for June of next year at the school, which specializes in teaching Conservative Judaism.

Project cost is estimated at \$11 million. School officials believe the price is worth it if expansion helps reverse a troubling trend.

They cite a national survey by the Council of Jewish Federations, which revealed that the growth of Judaism has slowed in the United States. Increase in interfaith marriages is one reason given.

Education is the key, school officials said.

"The survey says in their early years children tend to have an increased identification with their Jewish roots," said Hillel Day

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School President Robert Schoetack. "And the school has grown outgrown its space."

The addition will increase capacity by at least 100 students. Some 635 students attend the school.

Media center, gymnasium and computer and science labs are included in the expansion. A new chapel will also be built. The school relies on portable and has a chapel in a multi-purpose room.

More than half of the \$11 million has been raised through the school's "Generations Cam-

paign," which has come from private contributions. Hillel Day School has expanded twice since 1971. The school opened in 1958 with two classes and 29 students.

Hillel has grown to include a lower school for grades one through five and an upper school for grades six through eight. Hillel also has a kindergarten class.

Students learn in both Hebrew and English, studying both a Judaic and general curriculum.

"Our focus was educational; not brick and mortar," Schoetack said about the expansion.

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